

THE PERSONAL WORKPLACE

**A system of office furniture designed for
comfort**

VOLUME NUMBER

5

COLOR

THE PROCESS OF CHOOSING COLOR FOR AN OFFICE

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1. INTRODUCTION: COLOR AND LIGHT

If we analyze carefully, what is wrong with existing office systems, office environments, and office furniture, the most profound problem is the problem of light. The light is dead. The light which makes us comfortable, being in a meadow on a spring day, or being in a country cottage, or being in a georgian house with soft plaster walls and big windows... it is always the quality of light which makes us comfortable. It is daylight, of course, above all... but it is not because daylight has some special moral value. It is because daylight is *structurally different* from artificial light, and, above all, from the artificial light created by hung fluorescent ceilings.

It is this structural quality of daylight, which attracts us and makes us feel comfortable and alive.

We may understand this structural quality of daylight in the following way: The heavy and deadening quality of most offices comes from the system of lighting. Natural light has a sparkle, which works different on the eye, and differently on the body. It enormously increases your ability to work, think, discuss. It relieves your tiredness.

Consider, for example, the light which we enjoy outdoors, on a spring day. The light seems to be coming from the sun, or from the sky. It really isn't. The light that comes to our eye, is actually bouncing off hundreds of thousands of colored surfaces: the leaves on the trees, the rocks, the flowers, the sky itself, the colored walls of houses, pieces of stone and pebble, water, clouds, ...What we experience as beautiful soft light, is the product of the light coming from all these colors. Thus the myriad of colors, perhaps related, but multiple, changing in brightness, soft, hard, light, dark, sparkling and various, produces the overall light which we enjoy.

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The same thing, exactly, happens in a beautiful room. Not only is the light coming from all these natural colored surfaces outside the room... but as it comes in, it bounces off plaster, shadows, highlights, colored wood, reflections, a small blue tile, a red vase, a picture on the wall, ... above all, in a room which has beautiful light, if we analyze it carefully, the light varies enormously in brightness and color, as we look at each square inch on the ceiling and the walls. All this is *utterly* different from the rather dead grey and homogeneous light we are used to in a typical office. Even in those “modern” offices which try to use color, there are typically large flat areas of orange cloth, brown cloth, red cloth... but still put together in the flat homogeneous form which produces flatness of light and dead light.

In order to change it, we need to reproduce the structure of the light which exists in the meadow on a spring day. This is a patchwork of light, colored light and white light, dappled, reflecting, sparkling ... but always quiet and subtle.

It is this quality, which is the triumph of modern painters like Bonnard, or nineteenth century painters like the Monet. What they did is not something which we should only classify as art. It is an essential part of the structure of the world that makes us comfortable. To whatever extent possible, we need to produce this structure, directly, in the places where we live and work.

The profound flickering quality of light — the sense that it is a structure, made of rather bright colors, in small quantities, interlaced, and interacting, which produces the overall colors we perceive as subtle, beautiful, comfortable — and which, above all produce a quality of light that makes us comfortable and feel alive.

Color thus plays an essential and fundamental role in the workplace. In functional terms, the color plays a crucial role in the quality of light itself, one of the most important things in the personal workplace.

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In addition, the unique character of each workplace, and each office, comes from the fact that the color, like the layout, is personal and individual. People cannot function well without color. It is part of human feelings, and its presence is necessary to a normal and balanced life.

The color in the system is organized in such a way that the overall result will be harmonious, even when it is individual. The subtle harmony of color which is produced within the system, is delicate. It is achieved by a collection of colors that have been chosen as part of the system design.

The process of choosing colors in the personal workplace, is, essentially, a process which enables each user to produce an individual and personal version of this flickering shimmering light, within each office space. These colors, like the piece of furniture, are chosen to be personal, and to have feeling: they can be combined in special ways, according to simple rules, to produce a harmonious environment in your office.

The process of choosing color, is defined in detail in the following pages.

2. THE SYSTEM OF AVAILABLE COLORS

The following thirty four colors form the backbone of the system.

BLACKS

Bluish black

Red black

BLUES

Grey green blue

Milky blue

Pale blue

Deep azure

BROWNS

Brown #1 (pale umber/sienna)

Brown #2 (warm tobacco brown) *

Brown #3 (cold brown) *

GREENS

Pale milky green

Light emerald

Emerald

Milk grey green

Water green

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Turkish green

GRAYS

Grey #1 (yellow grey)

Grey #2 (blackish grey)

Grey #3 (pale violet grey)

Grey #4 (warm grey)

ORANGES

Brown orange *

PURPLES

Black violet

Soft grey lilac

REDS

Black scarlet

Subdued scarlet

Rose white

Persian carmine

Dusty red

YELLOWS

Naples yellow

Burnt orange yellow

Pale greenish yellow

Golden yellow

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WHITES

White #1 (soft brilliant white)

White #2 (grey white) *

White #3 (green white) *

3. THE COLOR SEQUENCE FOR YOUR OFFICE

The user is given 34 plywood squares, each 4"x4", which show samples of the available colors.

The first task you have, as a user, is to define the basic light for your office. This means, in practical terms, that you must choose a sequence of colors, from the 34, with a given set of proportions as shown below. This sequence of colors and proportions will be the basis for the color which your office contains.

An example of a color sequence for an office looks like this:

WHITE #2 (grey white)	50%
REDDISH BLACK	30%
PALE MILKY GREEN	10%
BURNT ORANGE YELLOW	7%
WATER GREEN	3%

The color sequence for the second prototype example room at CES is:

WHITE #1 (soft brilliant white)	50%
GREY GREEN BLUE	30%
BLUISH BLACK	15%
SOFT GREY LILAC	7%
BURNT ORANGE YELLOW	3%

The way you get these numbers for your sequence is by the following process.

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STEP 1.

Get a general idea of the color feeling you would like to have in your office. You may do this, just by knowing, or from your personal feelings. It has nothing to do with good taste: only with your feeling of life and harmony in the room you are going to use. If you cannot identify the general color feeling, or the kinds of colors you want, you may go directly to step 2.

STEP 2.

Choose about half a dozen of the color chips, and play with them, on a neutral surface (grey, white, table, wood.. it doesn't matter.

Play with these color chips, until you feel a pleasant harmony in the color they produce. In order to get this pleasant harmony, you need to use at least one, and perhaps more than one, of the subdued colors (whites, grays, or browns). The other colors will produce a pleasant light *with* these colors.

STEP 3.

In order to find the best combination of these colors, arrange them in an overlapping sequence, so that only a certain small amount of each color is showing. The example shown below, shows an overlapping series of colors, corresponding to the color sequence given above.

STEP 4.

Adjust the color sequence until the amounts of color make the harmony as comfortable and beautiful as you can.

In general, the amounts of color should be unequal, and should look something like this (the inches represent the length of color swatch which is showing, in your sequence).

4 inches
2 inches
1 inch
.5 inches
.25 inches.

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This kind of hierarchy of lengths is usually necessary to produce light, and if the amounts of color are equal you will only get a garish mixture.

However, you must ultimately be guided by your feeling, and your feeling of harmony.

STEP 5.

It is not necessary that the longest strips come first in sequence. You often find that an irregular sequence works best. So for instance, the same colors, in the same amounts, might be arranged in sequence like this:

1 inch
.25 inches
2 inches
.5 inches
4 inches.

The sequence will tell you how to place furniture in the room, and give s you an idea of dominant v less dominant colors.

STEP 6.

Measure the length of each part of the color sequence (as shown below). You may then use a calculator to get each color as a percentage, by dividing each length, by the total length of the color sequence.

4. THE COLOR KIT

To be practical, the office user will have a simple kit that allows him/her to judge the desirable selection and combination of colors for a given office.

The kit consists of a set of small thin wood panels, with samples of the colors lacquered onto them. These panels slide in a frame which has several slotted tracks on above the other. Inside the frame the viewer can slide different colored panels back and forward, according to the rules of color given above, until the overall color reaches the feeling desired.

The overall color feeling will then be directly visible in the frame.

When this has been reached percentage quantities of different colors to be used in the office, can be read directly from the frame, according to calibrations marked on the edge of the frame.

These percentages then become the basis of the color harmony for that office, and are embodied in the pieces of furniture ordered.